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THE MORE-THAN-VISUAL EXPERIENCES OF TOURISM

John Urry's focus on the tourist gaze (1990) marks a definitive shift away from hitherto singular, functionalist and ethnocentric theories about what tourists do, understand and feel. His key suggestion is that contemporary tourists typically anticipate visual encounters with cultural and natural sites upon which they subsequently gaze. According to Urry, these visual practices epitomize historically distinctive way of seeing, and in contemporary times he averred, they are embedded within a particularly ocularcentric culture in which images proliferate.

In *The Tourist Gaze* (1990), the most prominent visual practice enacted is the romantic gaze, inspired by historical constructions of the picturesque and the sublime. The enaction of this often-solitary gaze, has inspired the promiscuous photographing of scenes viewed at length during 'sightseeing' escapades. Urry claims that this highly normative, extensive tourist compilation of images relies on the consumption of similar images in promotional media before the trip has been undertaken, creating what he calls a 'hermeneutic circle', the endless recycling of similar images through which the representation of tourist sites becomes reified. This emphasis on visual consumption led Urry to identify other distinctive forms of the tourist gaze, including the 'collective', 'spectatorial', 'environmental' and 'anthropological' gazes. Other scholars have subsequently itemized the 'mutual', 'humanitarian' and 'social-mediatized gaze'; I have also identified the 'reverential gaze' and 'pharmacological gaze' (Edensor, 1998). In the updated, extensively revised *Tourist Gaze 3.0.* (2012), Urry and his co-author, Jonas Larsen, acknowledge that the gaze is entangled with olfactory, sonic and tactile oral experiences. However, there remains an insistence that the visual is the dominant organizing sense amongst tourists, and that the visual apprehension of sites, landscapes and people is merely supplemented by other sensory experience.

Here, I argue that though the visual is indeed integral to many tourist pursuits, tourism should be more broadly considered as multi-sensual in practice and experience. In opposing the contention that the visual is invariably the predominant sense mobilised by tourists, I suggest that the gaze is frequently accompanied by (Scarles, 2009) and subjugated by sonic, tactile and olfactory sensations. Indeed, a brief review of diverse tourist practices immediately provokes awareness that there is a wealth of more-than-visual experiences. The beach holiday solicits a range of sensory experiences that include a powerful awareness of the sun's heat on skin, the tactile effects of waves upon the swimming body, the sonic impressions of the crashing rhythms of the sea and the squawk of seabirds, the scents of seaweed and suntan lotion, and the granular irritations of sand in the body's crevices (Obrador-Pons, 2007). And as well as gazing upon the surrounding scenery and the path being followed, the walking or climbing holiday involves periods of time in which aching feet and muscles, shortness of breath and pain eclipse visual experience as dominant sensations (Lund, 2005). These tourist sensations are supplemented by numerous others, and the range and diversity of sensory experiences currently being made available for tourists are expanding.

These proliferating sensations could constitute a response to the contemporary prevalence of regulatory strategies that seek to maintain smooth mobile flows of vehicles and bodies, declutter spaces and reproduce normative aesthetic order. Dissatisfaction with the sterile 'blandscapes' that eventuate from such procedures perhaps instigate the pursuit of unfamiliar kinetic, aromatic, sonic and visual sensations. Yet despite this urge, and although influential

accounts characterise tourism as moving from the quotidian towards the extraordinary, authentic or liminal, many common tourist experiences are replete with routine, unreflexive habits performed in serial resorts, themed spaces and enclaves (Edensor, 2007). Such realms accord with highly managed spaces elsewhere in that they are sensually regulated to minimise disruption and provide a comfortable homeliness in which the body is cosseted into relaxation. Themed designs remove disturbing sights, the aromas of incense and aromatic blooms waft through space, harsh sounds are purged and replaced by piped muzak or trickling fountains, silken textures and air-conditioning enclose bodies, and smooth floors encourage seamless movement. Such locations satiate desires for reliability, comfort and unselfconscious relaxation, and encourage shared performative conventions of walking, lounging and consuming. While these spaces cater for the suspension of everyday stress and workaday routines, they instantiate a new set of habits, reiterations and predictabilities and promote the familiar, predictable, comfortable sensory environments that are characteristic of a particular form of serial upmarket tourist space.

However, in addition to these familiar, reliable sensory realms, numerous other tourist practices strive to escape highly ordered space, seeking out visceral, enlivening pursuits in which sensory apprehension is challenged or intensified. The quest for immersive sensation is evident in action sports such as bungee jumping and white water rafting, the white knuckle thrills sought at amusement parks, and the somatically enlivening endeavours of hang-gliding, mountain biking and canoeing. In depicting an especially radical departure from ordinary sensation, Stephanie Merchant (2011) reveals how scuba divers learn new sensory skills, notably in developing very different ways of touching and hearing, since the senses that they usually rely upon are unreliable when underwater. Though this may be initially alarming and awkward, such sensations may be thrilling in their alterity, as with other immersive experiences in spa tourism, dance tourism and urban exploration. Exemplifying the sheer multi-sensory entanglements of certain highly immersive tourist occasions, Arun Saldanha (2002) describes a Goan beach rave in which the sounds of music, smells of sweat, kerosene and cannabis combine with the sight of the moon and swaying coconut trees, the tactilities of moving bodies, sand underfoot and humidity.

A more sustained immersion in sensual otherness is also exemplified by forms of space in which backpackers temporarily dwell. Movement through the sensually rich, socially diverse, cluttered materialities of such 'heterogeneous' honeypots solicits encounters with rough textures, undulating pavements and dust. Noises emitted by machines, people and animals, the horrible and delicious smells that emanate from a market, and the disruptive tactilities provoked by dense crowds and uneven surfaces also offer unaccustomed sensory experiences (Edensor, 2001). In seeking sensual otherness, tourists may welcome or recoil from these unfamiliar stimuli. For instance, at the start of their adventures through India and Thailand, many female backpackers embraced the experience of repellent smells, dirt and noise. In signifying an ability to cope with such sensations, these young travellers developed self-pride and acquired cultural capital. Yet over a longer period they modulated overwhelming and harsh sensory experience with visits to comfortable hotels and air-conditioned restaurants that served familiar food (Edensor and Falconer, 2012).

This demonstrates how tourists typically manage desires for both sensory familiarity and alterity. The cultural conventions through which we interpret what we sense shift across the cosmological, moral, aesthetic and political, and vary enormously across time and space. Yet

it is also vital to acknowledge that these interpretations of sensory experience are invariably entangled with the affordances of the world we encounter. As tourists, we tell stories about what we have encountered *after* an immanent, immersive sensory engagement with the world. Accordingly, although tourists seek out specific sensorial qualities, movement through even highly regulated realms cannot always preclude the surprising, the contingent and the unexpected. When such sensory intrusions they emerge, they may be frightening and disturbing, but equally, may be welcomed as memorable, and narrated after the event as momentous. In this way, our sensory phenomenological experiences are thoroughly intertwined with the meanings we attribute during our encounter with the currents and energies of a world-in-form, with the affordances of the sites and spaces we gaze upon, move through, smell, hear and touch. Furthermore, we cannot escape from the ways in which our distinctively human sensory capacities apprehend how light falls upon landscape, negotiates the surface of the ground, receive sound from many sources, and smell the scent of leaf mould or perfume. In tourism, as with all experience, sensation is thus biologically shaped, culturally conditioned and subject to more-than-human agencies all at the same time. It is also always more-than-visual.

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